



Al-Risala 1984

July

Editorial

Muslims often complain that Islam is misrepresented in the foreign, especially Western, media. There is no doubt that this claim is, to a certain extent, justified. Political, economic and cultural rivalry between the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds, stretching from the time of the Crusades, through the colonial period, to the present day, had made non-Muslims wary of Islam, and led them to paint a distorted picture of it.

In modern times this apprehension of Islam has grown to unprecedented levels due to the spread in the Muslim world of militant political organizations bent on the establishment – at the expense of the existing order – of Islamic states. At the same time the increasing economic clout wielded by oil-producing nations has created tremors in the industrial world. The old custodians of economic and political power have thus come to think of Islam, not just as a rival, but as a positive threat. Naturally, they have made stringent efforts to ward off this threat.

These sentiments were expressed by Alain Woodrow in an article in the French newspaper *Le Monde*, later published in English in the Manchester *Guardian Weekly*. According to Mr. Woodrow, the fear of Islam resurfacing in France is due to the “twin resurgence of Islam, both on an economic front, thanks to its oil resources, and on a political front, in the form of militant fundamentalism.”

(*Guardian Weekly*, July 31, 1983)

This, of course, is a misrepresentation of Islam, for as the President of the Islamic Centre, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, wrote in reply to Alain Woodrow’s article, “neither of these cause that are cited have anything to do with Islam. The fear generated by these factors is not a fear of Islam. It can only be said to be either of some Muslim nations or some movements launched by Muslim extremists. Islam and Muslims are not equal to each other”

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan’s reply to Alain Woodrow’s article, reprinted in full on the opposite page, was given due prominence in the *Guardian Weekly* (September 4, 1983) and accorded the headline “Islam per se is not a threat.”

This shows that, if the Western media has been used by anti-Islamic forces to paint a distorted picture of Islam, it can be used just as well by Islamic forces to correct that picture. What the Muslims must do is ensure that a correct picture of Islam reaches the West, for if Muslims do not convey a true impression of Islam, then how can they expect others to do so?

3 July 1984

Islam Per se is Not a Threat

According to Alain Woodrow (Le Monde Section, July 31) "the fear of Islam" resurfacing in France is due to the "twin resurgence of Islam, both on an economic front, thanks to its oil resources, and on a political front, in the form of militant fundamentalism."

Guardian readers will be surprised to learn that neither of these causes which are cited have anything to do with Islam. The fear generated by these factors is not a fear of Islam. It can only be said to be a fear of some Muslim nations or some movements launched by Muslim extremists. Islam and Muslims are not equal to each other.

The oil resources which are found in Muslim countries are after all, due to an accident of geography. What has this got to do with Islam? Islam existed before oil was found beneath Arab soil, and will survive after the exhaustion of the oil resources of Muslim nations.

As for fear on the political front, the Islamic fundamentalism which causes it is a product of misinterpretation of Islamic tenets. Some Muslim movements have adopted militant fundamentalism to achieve their worldly ends. The threat posed by such movements is not an Islamic threat: it is a threat posed by the politicised version of Islam which these movements represent.

If one sees Islam as a socio-political system, then one is bound to see the establishment of an Islamic state as essential to Islam. But Islam is not a mere social system. Islam, in the real sense, is a mode of individual behaviour, based on a personal sense of responsibility towards God. Islam is a God-oriented life, not a politics-oriented one. If the people of the world could realise the true Islam, then they would learn to love it rather than fear it.

Wahiduddin Khan,

President, Islamic Centre, New Delhi

The Message of the Qur'an

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Chapter 2,

"When your Lord said to the angels: 'I am placing a caliph on earth,' they replied: 'Will You put there one that will do evil and shed blood, when we have for so long sung Your praises and sanctified Your name?' He said: 'I know what you do not know.' He taught Adam all the names and then set them before the angels, saying: 'Tell me the names of these, if what you say be true.' 'Glory be unto You,' they replied, 'we have no knowledge except that which You have given us. You alone are wise and all-knowing.' Then said He to Adam: 'Tell them their names.' And when Adam had named them, He said: 'Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of heaven and earth, and all that you hid and all that you reveal?' (30-33)

The literal meaning of the word 'caliph' is one who takes another's place – a successor. In the age of hereditary rule it was generally used for a monarch who took the place of another monarch. According to its usage, then, the word came to refer to one invested with power.

When God created man, He determined that man should wield power on earth. The angels were apprehensive of man being corrupted by his power and free-will, and causing bloodshed on earth. The angels were not mistaken in their apprehension: God too was fully aware of this possibility. But He was looking at the matter from another aspect. For if many human beings were corrupted by their power, a substantial proportion of mankind would acknowledge the fact that, in spite of their power and freedom on earth, they were really powerless before one Almighty God. Such people would, of their own accord, adopt the path of submission and obedience to God. True, they would be comparatively few in number, but they would be as precious as the grains of a crop. Grain is far outweighed by hay and straw, but so great is its value, that vast quantities of hay and straw are allowed to grow and flourish in the land, just so that grain can come into being.

God, in His omnipotence, brought all the progeny of Adam before their first father. Then He said to the angels: 'Look, this is the progeny of Adam. Can you give the name of each one of them, and tell what sort of people they will be?' The angels, having no knowledge about them, could not tell. God told Adam their names and their characteristics, and then commanded him to pass the knowledge on to the angels. When Adam had explained to the angels the nature of the human race, they realized that, besides wicked and corrupt people, there would also be great, righteous, pious souls among their number.

Man's greatest crime, next to denial of his Lord, is to spread corruption and cause bloodshed on earth. No individual or nation has God's permission to act in a manner that disrupts the order of nature established by God. Man should not take the life of man. All actions of this nature disqualify man from receiving God's mercy. Everything in nature functions according to a norm set for it by God. To follow this norm is to "make peace" and to deviate from it is to spread corruption.

"And when We said to the angels: 'Prostrate yourselves before Adam.' they all prostrated themselves except Satan, who, in his pride, refused, and became an unbeliever. To Adam We said: 'Dwell with your wife in Paradise and eat of its fruits to your heart's content wherever you will. But never approach this tree or you shall become transgressors.' But Satan made them forget this injunction and caused them to be driven out of the state of felicity in which they had been. 'Go hence,' We said, 'and may your offspring be enemies to each other. The earth will be for a while your dwelling-place and sustenance.' Then Adam received commandments from his Lord, and his Lord relented towards him. He is the Forgiving One, the Merciful. Go down hence, all,' We said. 'When Our guidance comes unto you those that accept it shall have nothing to fear or to regret; but those that deny and reject Our revelations shall be the heirs of Hell, and there they shall abide forever. ", (34-39)

God stood Adam up among the angels, as well as Satan, and tested them by commanding them to prostrate themselves before Adam. In this way he gave the first man on earth a practical demonstration of the two paths that would be open to his progeny. Either they would follow the example of the angels and bow to God's commandments, even if this meant bowing before an inferior creature; or else they would be proud like Satan, and refuse to bow before others. This is the test that man faces in his entire life. Here on earth man is constantly faced with two alternative courses of action. He can either follow the angelic course and carry out God's commandments by bowing before truth and justice in all that he does; or he can act as Satan did and, letting himself be controlled by arrogance and contempt, refuse to concede the right of others.

This was the lesson of the forbidden tree. It is when man lets himself be deceived by Satan, and exceeds the bounds that God has laid down for him, that he goes astray. As soon as he eats of the "forbidden fruit" he is deprived of God's grace or, in other words, Paradise. But this loss is not an irretrievable one. Man still has the opportunity to turn in repentance to his Lord, rectify his actions and seek forgiveness for his sins. When he turns to the Lord in repentance, God relents towards him, and cleanses him of his sins as if he had never committed them.

The raising of the call to truth among men is a test of this nature. The preacher of truth is an "Adam"; it is for people to bow before him. If, carried away by pride and prejudice, they refuse to acknowledge his position, then they are following in Satan's footsteps. God does not become plainly visible in this world; He tests people by revealing Himself through His signs. Those who can interpret His signs have discovered God Himself, and those who fail to interpret His signs have failed to find God.

6 July 1984

“Everything in nature sings the praises of the Lord.” Quran

When North American Indians feel depressed, they revive their spirits by standing with their backs to an oak in spring and absorbing its strength and power. Bismarck, the Iron Chancellor of Germany (1815-1898), used to employ the same technique, Ralph Whitlock of the Guardian tells of someone who tried this method swearing ‘She can feel the vibrations, as one feels the vibrations of a telephone post by clasping it, and can even hear the tree “singing”’.

6 July 1984

True actions are those in which worldly profit and prestige is not sought

A man came to the Prophet, and asked him about the one who participates in 'Jihad', but does so for worldly profit and fame. What will be his reward? "He will have no reward," the Prophet answered. He repeated the question three times, and each time the Prophet gave the same answer. "God only accepts those actions which are performed for His sake alone, and nothing but His good pleasure is sought," the Prophet added.

A Grand Adventure

“Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success.”

Sir Ernest Shackleton *The Times*, 1900

This is an advertisement published in *The Times*, London, 1900, by Sir Ernest Shackleton. He required a team for exploration of the Antarctic. As a result of this advertisement Shackleton's epic voyage to within 100 miles of the South Pole (1907-1909) took place.

No commercial stunts or slogans, just a few lines of type, pulled answers far exceeded the requirements, so Shackleton had to make a selection from among them in order to form a team.

It was neither the subject of the advertisement nor the personality of the advertiser which produced such a great response; it was the nation to whom the appeal was made. It is a historical fact that during the 19th century the British nation was the most ambitious and adventurous nation in the world. On account of this it had established an empire which extended over such a vast portion of the globe that the sun never set on it. Indeed it was not only for Antarctic exploration, but for any adventure whatsoever, that this nation could produce highly dependable people.

The Islamic Centre and *Al-Risala Monthly* breathe the same spirit as the above advertisement. Our appeal, then, is addressed to those who have the same spirit of adventure and self-sacrifice as those who responded to Shackleton's appeal. Our aim is to form a team which will set out, as Shackleton's team did, on a grand adventure requiring self-denial and courage. This team, however, will have its sights set not on any worldly goal but on an eternal cause: it will strive to communicate the true message of Islam to the people of the world. The Muslim world today is engaged in all manner of activities; but it has neglected this all-important task.

This is a mission which demands the sacrifice of life and property; it calls for there linquishment of desires and ambitions; it requires one to rise above thoughts of visible gain in this world for the sake of invisible gain that is promised in the life to come, for God has promised paradise to those who come forward to serve His cause. Eternal blessing and eternal comfort: they are there for the asking. Will anyone come forward?

MOHAMMAD: Prophet of Revolution

Part I, Chapter I

From Adam to the Messiah

All of the prophets had the same mission. They taught that man's life on earth was just a part of his eternal life. In this world he was being tested; in the next world he would be rewarded for his efforts. Man had just a short time on earth. Afterwards he would take up his eternal abode, in heaven, if he had followed the way of the Lord; or in hell, if he had strayed from it. This was the reality of life that they taught.

Adam was the first man on earth, he was also the first prophet. He was succeeded by a long line of prophets, up to the Messiah. Altogether there were 124,000 messengers of God, of whom 315 were prophets. They appeared in different lands and among different peoples, preaching the word of God and exhorting men to live in fear of Him. But very few of those they addressed were willing to give up their freedom for the sake of God. No one, for instance, followed the Prophet Yahya (John the Baptist) and he died a martyr's death. When Lot left his people only two of his daughters accompanied him. According to the Old Testament, only eight people entered the ark along with Noah. When Abraham left his native country, Iraq, the only people to accompany him were his wife Sarah and his nephew Lot. They were later joined by his two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. After great missionary effort on the part of Jesus, only twelve of those who heard his teachings followed him, and even they forsook him at the moment of truth.

(Mathew, 26:25)

This was the case with most of the prophets. Some were left completely alone, whilst others found a few followers, mostly members of their own families. For them, ties of kith and kin were conducive to belief in the prophets. This verse of the Quran sums up the whole of prophetic history:

Alas for the servants! They laugh to scorn every prophet that comes to them.

In God's sight, the prophets stand head and shoulders above the human race. How extraordinary it is, then, that they are the very ones to whom the least historical importance has been attached. History has fully chronicled the lives of kings and soldiers, but not one single prophet's life has been given its due place in the annals of history. Aristotle (384-322BC) was born one thousand years after the Prophet Moses, yet he was not even acquainted with Moses' name. The reason is not far to seek: most of the prophets were rejected by their peoples: their homes were demolished; they were treated as outcasts from society; they appeared so unimportant that no one deemed it necessary to even make any mention of them.

Why were the prophets treated in this manner? There was just one reason for this, and that was their criticism of their peoples' practices. Man loves nothing more than that he should be praised; and he loathes nothing more than that he should be criticized, the prophets came to expose the difference between right and wrong; they made no compromise with their peoples; they persistently pointed out the faults in people's beliefs and actions. Consequently, people turned against them. If the prophets had taught what people wanted to hear, they would never have been treated in this manner.

This was the fate of most of the prophets. A few of them, however, were spared, Joseph, Solomon and David being names that immediately spring to mind. But the power and prestige that these prophets acquired was not due to the popularity of their teachings; they had an entirely separate origin.

David was a young soldier in the army of the Israelites under King Saul. During his time the Israelites and Philistines went to war with each other. Among the army of Philistines was the giant Goliath. So powerful a fighter was he that everyone was afraid of doing battle with him. King Saul announced that he would give his daughter in marriage to anyone who slew Goliath. David challenged the giant, and killed him. So he became the son-in-law of the King of Israel. In a subsequent war both King Saul and his heir – apparent were killed in battle, and David was crowned King of Israel. Solomon was David's son, and succeeded to his father's throne. As for Joseph, he was endowed by God with the ability to interpret dream. The King of Egypt, impressed by his ability, entrusted the affairs of state to him. But the king still remained head of state. He and his subjects continued to adhere to their pagan religion.

This hostile treatment meted out to the prophets throughout the ages, deprived people of true guidance and, what was even more serious, made the preservation of the scriptures and teachings of the prophets impossible. Only a prophet's followers can preserve his teachings after him; but the prophets either had no followers, or so few as to be unable to counter the challenges of their society to the preservation of the Holy Scriptures.

The knowledge of God is eternal. He sees the future just as He does the past. He was aware, before the sending of the prophets, that this would be the fate of the human race. So He had decreed that He would remedy this situation at the end of the prophetic era by sending His own special envoy to the world: a prophet whose job would be not only to preach religion, but also to exalt it above all others on earth, he would be granted special succour from God, enabling him to compel his people to bow to the truth. God would keep him on earth until he had rectified the perversions of the society around him. God's own might would assist the Prophet to vanquish his enemies. In this way the true religion would be established on solid foundations facilitating the preservation of the God. In the Book of the Bible, "for the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea."

(Habakkuk, 2: 14)

Translations and additions have taken the present-day Bible very far from the original. But it still contains multiple references to the coming of the Prophet Mohammad. If one studies the Bible objectively, one will find certain references that cannot be applied to any other than to him. The very purpose of the

mission of the Prophet Jesus was to announce to the world, and to the Jewish nation in particular, the coming of the final prophet. The “New Testament” to which he referred was, in truth, Islam, for it marked the replacement of the Jews by the Children of Ishmael as recipients of the word of God. They were the ones to whom the New Testament was to be delivered. The Injil is a prophecy of the New Testament; it is not the New Testament itself.

The Prophet Jesus came to the world six hundred years before the last of the Prophets. In one reference to Jesus, the Quran has this to say:

And remember the Prophet Jesus, who said to the Children of Israel: “I am send forth to you by God to confirm the Torah already revealed and to give news of an apostle that will come after me whose name is Ahmad.”

(61:6)

The words “Ahmad” and “Mohammad” have the same meaning: the praised one. In the Gospel of Barnabas the name of the coming prophet is given quite clearly as Mohammad. But since the Christians consider the Gospel of Barnabas to be apocryphal, we do not consider it fit to quote from that source. We cannot even be sure whether Jesus, in his prophecy, referred to Ahmad or Mohammad. Most probably he used a word with the same meaning as these names.

According to the tradition of the historian Mohammad Ibn Ishaq (died 152AH), quoted by Ibn Hisham in his biography of the Prophet, the word that Jesus used was “Munhamann”. Ibn Ishaq is considered the most authentic source on the subject of the Prophet’s life. He writes that he had learnt from scholars of the Scriptures that the word used by Jesus in his prophecy of a coming prophet was Munhamann.¹ This tradition probably reached him by way of Palestinian Christians who had come under Islamic rule. Munhamann is a Syrian word. It means the praised one. The people of Palestine, harking back to their past, still spoke the Syrian tongue. It had also been Jesus’ mother tongue. It is quite conceivable that the word used by Jesus was Munhamann, and the word had been preserved in their traditions. When the Bible was translated into Greek, the word became “Paraclete”.

1. *Tahzeeb Seerat Ibn Hisham*, Vol. I, p. 500

11 July 1984

Not even martyrdom can exonerate one from debts

The Prophet gave a sermon in which he extolled the struggle for the cause of God and faith in Him as the most virtuous of actions. A man rose, and asked the Prophet the meaning of what he was saying. "If I die for the cause of God, will I be cleansed of my sins?" "Yes," the Prophet replied, "as long as you remain steadfast, and are killed while struggling for the cause of God; as long as you are seeking to please God, and are pressing on, not falling back." The Prophet paused for a minute. "What was it that you said?" he asked. "I asked the meaning of your words," the man said. "If I die for the cause of God, then will I be cleansed of my sins?" "Yes," the Prophet replied. "As long as you remain steadfast, are seeking to please God, and are pressing on, not falling back; unless, that is, you are in debt. The angel, Gabriel, has informed me of this."

12 July 1984

God the Greatest

The distinguished mathematician, Sir Michael Francis Atiyah, who visited Bombay recently, said that God was a mathematician. This idea is not new. About fifty years ago, Sir James Jeans suggested that the universe was handiwork of a mathematician. Centuries before him Pythagoras said that all things are numbers. To Picasso, God was an artist. "God is really another artist," he said. "He invented the giraffe, the elephant and the cat." Einstein once said that the Lord is subtle and – though not malicious – is very clever.

One who observes the universe is confronted with the awesome feeling that there is a being greater than himself at work in it. A mathematician comes across such high mathematics as to make him aware of the triviality of his grasp of the subject. "God is a great mathematician!" he exclaims. To an artist, the art displayed in the universe appears so sublime as to make his art seem worthless and he spontaneously cries out, "God is the greatest artist!" The wisdom prevailing in the universe is such as to astonish a genius; he in turn discovers that there is a genius far greater than him at work.

The truth is that God is the greatest mathematician, the greatest artist and the greatest genius. One who fails to find the manifestations of God in the universe is blind, and one who does not believe in God after having seen Him insensate.

God's might is indeed manifest in a thousand ways, but it is only those who open their minds and hearts to Him who can be truly aware of His blessings.

12 July 1984

A modest reply

Umer arrived in Palestine with a group of Muhajirs and Ansars. He had a shirt made of patch, coarse cotton cloth, which he gave to Asqaf to wash and mend; it had been torn in the back from making such a long journey riding on camelback. Asqaf took the shirt and fixed it. When he brought it back, he brought another shirt of thin fine cloth with it. Umer asked him what he had brought. "Your shirt," Asqaf replied, "I have washed it and patched; and I have brought you another shirt as a gift." Umer looked at it, touched it, then put on his own shirt and gave the other one back to Asqaf. "This one absorbs sweat better," he explained.

Sowing Today, Reaping Tomorrow

G.D. Birla (1894-1983) was born in the village of Pilani, Rajasthan. His father was an ordinary tradesman, who had a small business in Calcutta. At the age of fourteen, Mr. Birla left for Calcutta to assist in his father's business.

One day, Mr. Birla had some work in the top storey of a commercial building of Calcutta. He was stopped from entering the lift for it was for the use of British officers only. He ascended by the staircase, only to find that he was not allowed to sit on a chair there either. He was brought to a bench which was reserved for peons. But the young Birla did not sit on it. He stayed standing until his work was finished.

Experiences of this nature during the British rule instilled Mr. Birla with a longing for Indian independence, and he joined Mahatma Gandhi's freedom movement. This was a time when rich capitalists were wary of associating themselves with Congress. But Mr. Birla was an extremely farsighted and courageous man. He caught a glimpse of the post-1947 Congress party in the pre-1947 one. He saw a free India in the India that was struggling for independence; he realized that the leader of today would be the minister of tomorrow; if he assisted them today, he would benefit immensely from them tomorrow. He started to provide the freedom movement with regular financial support. It is said that up to 1947, he had already donated 20 crore rupees (200 million) to Mr. Gandhi and the Congress party.

Mr. Birla reaped enormous benefits from this after independence. He was granted every kind of special facility by the new government. So astronomical was his rise that he soon became the greatest industrialist of free India. The Birla family is today considered to be the richest in India.

It is the one who sows today will reap tomorrow. This is true for both the present world and the future world.

13 July 1984

Spending with prudence even in times of affluence

The Prophet passed by Sa'ad, who was casually performing his ablutions' from a big pot of water. "What's this extravagance, Sa'ad?" The Prophet asked. Sa'ad was surprised that there should be extravagance even in ablutions. "Of course, there is," the Prophet said, "even if one is on the bank of a stream."

Learning to teach

Having a purpose in life makes one
overlook all other considerations.
One is willing to endure every hardship
to achieve one's goal.

In November 1922 a thirty-four year old Spanish priest by the name of Fr Henry Heras (1889-1956) landed in Bombay harbour. The land of India fascinated him. He was sure that it would be fertile ground for Christian missionary work. He decided to settle in the country and pursue his missionary activities here.

But India was not Fr Heras' mother land. He had to have a base if he was to work in the country; only after he had established himself here would he be able to start preaching among the Indian people. He decided that he would practice as a teacher in India, and then plan his work from there. In a teaching capacity, he felt, he would be able to work both inside the college campus and outside.

A few days later he met the principal of St Xavier's College, Bombay. The young priest was a historian, and had a degree in history from his own country: "Which branch of history would you like to teach?" the principal asked him, after going through his testimonials. "Indian History," Fr Heras replied at once. "What do you know about Indian History?" the principal asked him: Fr Heras said he knew nothing. "How, then, are you going to teach it?" "I shall study it," Fr Heras answered.

Fr Heras realized that he was not going to teach history as a profession. If he had been adopting it on a career basis then he could have taught European history or any branch of history that he was acquainted with and remained content with a pay-packet at the end of every month. He had a special aim in mind, and that was to establish a base for his missionary work. For this purpose Indian history was the most suitable topic available to him. He was in India, and would be in a better position to communicate his religion to the youth of the country as a teacher of Indian history. That was, why – despite his unfamiliarity with the topic – he chose Indian history as his subject.

He studied Indian history so hard that he not only became an accomplished history teacher; he also established himself as a historian of the same class as Sir Jadunath Sarkar and Dr Surendra Nath Sen. The Heras Institute of Bombay stands today as a living memorial to Fr Heras and his life-work.

If one has a purpose in life, then one will overlook all other considerations and concentrate on achieving one's goal. Everything one does will be aimed at that end. One will not act on the basis of mundane and temporary profit; one will undergo loss, and endure hardship, if it serves to bring one closer to one's goal. There are many Muslims in the world today who say they would like to accomplish "missionary work." But are they ready for the selfless struggle that work entails?

Those who do not fear God cannot fathom the states of the godly

The expedition to Tabuk was undertaken under very difficult circumstances. Abdullah Ibn Abbas tells of how the Prophet asked the Muslims to give alms in aid of the expedition. People would contribute according to their means. Abdullah Ibn Auf gave two hundred "auqiyas", which was more than of anyone. The Prophet asked him whether he had left anything for his household. Abdul Rahman said that he had. "How much?" the Prophet asked. "However much (in) blessing and reward that God and His Prophet have promised," Abdul Rahman answered. Abu Aqeel Ansari contributed one "Sa'a" of dates. He brought them to the Prophet, saying how he had earned two "sa'as" by pulling water for a Jew all night. He had given one sa'a, which amounts to about four kilos, to his family, and brought another to the Prophet. But still he felt ashamed. "I'm sorry, I had noting else to give," he said to the Prophet. But the hypocrites of Medina poured scorn on the Muslims' donations. Some they accused of ostentation, and concerning others they said: "This person needs the sa'a that he is giving away more than anyone else."

The Day of Judgement

There was a headline in the Bangalore edition of *The Indian Express* (September 9, 1983) which read: GLITTER IS NOT GOLD.

The story was about a Miss Sybil D'Silva, who lives in Artillery Road, Bangalore. She was visited in her home by a woman aged about 35, holding a child of about six months in her arms. She told Miss D'Silva that her husband was seriously ill, and that she needed 5000 rupees urgently for his treatment. "I am not begging from you," she said, taking a golden necklace out of her pocket. "All I want to do is sell this golden necklace. Dear as it is to me, my husband's health is dearer. It would sell for 10,000 rupees in the market. But, because I need the money, I will give it to you for just 5000."

Miss D'Silva said she was not interested, but the woman kept pleading the desperateness of her case. Eventually she persuaded Miss D'Silva to give her the money, and buy the necklace.

Next day Miss D'Silva took the necklace to a goldsmith on Bangalore's Commercial Street. He tested it on his touchstone. After examination, its reality came to light. Telling her story to the Bangalore police, Miss D'Silva said: "He told me it was brass."

So it will be in the next world. In this world, everyone is delighted with his deeds; everyone thinks of what he has done as gold. But gold is only real when it is shown to be such on the goldsmith's touchstone. In the next world, God will judge everybody's actions on His own touchstone.

The value of gold will only be attached to those actions which are proved to be made of gold when put on God's touchstone. If one's golden actions turn out to be made of brass, then they will only mean disgrace and doom. Actions which people attach so much value to that they are never ready to forsake them; they will seek to be rid of these very actions. They will disown that which was dearest to them in the world. But on that day there will be no disownment. That which they were proud of in the world will cause them only disgrace and humiliation when they come before God.

Extravagance should be eschewed in favour of wise spending. The Prophet said, "I have not witnessed any extravagance without there being a worthy cause going wanting."

Discovery of God

Someone once said to the renowned Indian scientist, Sir C.V. Raman that the discoveries which scientists have made were not really the achievement of scientists; they were the result of chance. "That is true," Dr Raman replied, "but chance of this nature only happens to scientists."

Discovery essentially comes from concentration of mind. The more one focuses one's attention on a particular subject, the more enlightened one becomes in it. One becomes involved in it night and day. Thus one develops a close mental affinity for it.

Scientific discoveries usually result from the familiarity which one develops with a certain subject by concentrating on it entirely. A slight allusion is enough for one to grasp a whole topic. Discovery is usually progression from a partial truth to an absolute one. Such progression is only possible for those who are already engrossed in their subject and have become familiar with every side of it.

What is true of scientific discovery is also true of spiritual discovery. God is also a discovery for man. But only one who is engrossed in God can make such a discovery.

Discovery of God comes from concentrating on God, from seeing with divine vision and hearing with divine ears. When one turns away from all else and turns towards God alone, then time and time again will one experience the discovery of God. The sight of the wonders of nature, the study of the history of man, contemplation of one's own being – everything in the world will make one think of God; everything will turn one's mind towards the Supreme Reality. One will see His glory everywhere. Only those who abide in God can discover Him. Discovery of God is a gift that cannot be granted to those who are attached to other things besides Him.

17 July 1984

Who gave the moths this penetrating vision?

Man looks at a white flower. He can only tell that it is white. He cannot distinguish between ordinary white flowers and those flowers which also glow with ultra-violet light. Moths, however, can tell the difference, and it is upon them that these flowers depend for fertilization.

Right Text Wrong Heading

On March 3, 1984, an internationally renowned Indian Muslim scholar addressed a meeting held in the I M A Hall, New Delhi. The hall was almost bustling with the people eager to hear the words of this fountain-head of wisdom.

The subject of his speech was one of the Prophet of Islam's first sermons to the Quraish* When the verse of the Quran, "And warn your nearest kinsfolk (26:214)," was revealed, the Prophet ascended Mount Safa and called for the attention of Quraish. People gathered to hear what he had to say. "Bani Muttalib, Bani Fahr, Bani Lawi," the Prophet said, addressing them all separately by the names of their clans, "if I were to tell you that there was an army behind this mountain, coming to attack you, would you believe me?" Everyone said that they would, for the Prophet was known as the truthful person. "Well, the Prophet said, "I am warning you of a dreadful and imminent doom."

*The Arabian tribe from which the Prophet was descended

Clearly the purpose of the Prophet calling his people together, and admonishing them in this manner, was to warn of a terrible fate in the hereafter for those who refused to submit to one God, and believe in the Quran that had been revealed to him in his role of God's messenger.

But the speaker who addressed this huge gathering of Muslims put a different construction upon the words of the prophet. To him the most important thing about the Prophet's sermon was not the message that is conveyed, but the fact that the Prophet referred to his own impeccable and universally accepted good character. The Muslims too, he said, should advertise their faith by showing high moral character in their dealings with others.

What the Prophet's sermon was genuinely concerned with was warning people of the coming of the Day of Judgement, when the good would be rewarded and the evil punished. It was, in short, a sermon preaching Islam and calling to the faith. But the heading that the speaker put the Prophet's words under was 'Islamic Character which was surely a great shift of emphasis, although a very valid point.

Such has been the case with almost all the Muslim scholars in recent times. Words of the Prophet, and verses of the Quran, which are meant to impress upon Muslims the importance of calling mankind to true faith in God, have been placed in misleading wrong contexts. That is why Muslims in the present day and age are oblivious to their prime responsibility: preaching the word of God.

After Being Broken

The atom is the final unit of matter, just as the individual is the final unit of society. If one succeeds in breaking an atom one does not destroy it; rather one converts it into a greater force, known as atomic energy. Matter is energy in a solid form and energy matter in a dispersed form. When the atoms of matter are broken and converted into atomic energy, they are transformed into a force much more potent than in their material form.

A locomotive consumes two tons of coal in seventy miles; a motorcar uses up a gallon of petrol every twenty to forty miles. But when uranium weighing just twelve pounds is converted into atomic energy, it is able to convey a high-speed rocket on a 40,000 mile journey into space. That's how great the difference is between ordinary material energy and atomic energy.

So it is with that unit of society known as man. When man is 'broken,' his horizons expand vastly. Just as breakage does not destroy matter, so defeat does not ruin man. Matter increases in strength when broken up. So man, when defeated, gains new, increased strength.

When man is beset by defeat, his inner forces are released. His senses are aroused. His concealed strength comes to the fore and he sets about redressing his setback. Spurred on with new resolve and determination, he devotes himself to the task of regaining what has been lost. An irresistible spirit arises within him. Nothing can arrest his advance. Like a river flowing to the sea, he surmounts every obstacle in relentless pursuit of his goal.

The occurrence of an atomic explosion in matter turns it into a vastly more powerful substance. The human personality, too, contains huge, latent potential. This potential bursts out into the open when there is an eruption within one's soul. It breaks free when some shattering disaster afflicts one. The strings that have held one down are torn apart and begin to vibrate to the tune of life.

The Difference between a Believer and an Unbeliever

The Quran says that on Judgement-day, when mankind is gathered before God, man will look upon his deeds. Those who denied God, and rebelled against Him, will behold the doom that awaits them. In anguish they will cry out:

“Would that I were dust!”
(78:40)

When Umer, the second caliph of Islam, lay on his death-bed, stricken by the dagger of Abu Lulu Firoz, his son, Abdullah Ibn Umeer was resting his father’s head in his lap. “Rub my cheek in the dust, Abdullah,” Umer said to him. Abdullah Ibn Umer did so. Then, with his head resting on the ground, Umer addressed these words to himself:

“Woe betide you, Umer, and woe betide the one who gave birth to you, if God does not forgive you.”

(Tabqat Ibn Saad)

If one compares both these events, one will find that the very words uttered by unbelievers in the next world, are those uttered by believers in this world. In the life after death, unbelievers will wish they were dust. But here we have a believer saying, before he dies, in this life on earth: “Join me with the dust.”

Who dare rebel against God when He appears before man? Everyone will submit to Him then. But the only creditable submission of God is that which comes before He makes Himself manifest. Unbelievers will bow to God when He reveals Himself before them. But a believer bows to Him while He is still invisible.

The only reason that people rebel against God is that He is not now present before them. But how can one rebel against Him when He manifests Himself in all His might? Man is cowed into submission before a lion. How then can he dare otherwise when he comes face to face with God, the creator of the lion?

The truth is that a believer experiences in this world what an unbeliever will experience in the next world. An unbeliever will humble himself on seeing God: a believer does so without seeing Him.

When the Journey Ends

After a long journey, the express train was approaching its destination. The view from the train indicated that the final station was near. Hundreds of passengers were filled with new life. Some were fastening their bedding; some were changing clothes; some were just peering expectantly out of the window. All were excited, eagerly awaiting their journey's end.

Suddenly, there was a violent thud. The express had collided with a train waiting in the yard. One can easily imagine what happened then: happiness suddenly turned to grief, and vibrant lives were faced with violent death; hope was transformed into despair. A story, which seemed to be heading for a happy ending, became a tragedy at the final moment.

So it is with life. Man strives to make himself comfortable in this world, to see his ambitions fulfilled and his life a successful one. But death comes just as his dreams are nearing completion. He leaves his lavish mansion for the desolation of the grave, his glistening body to be devoured by earth and worms. His life's labour vanishes without trace as if there was no connection between him and all that he had strived for on earth.

Visions of greatness had occupied his mind, but he is forced to enter the grave, and from there proceed to God's court of justice. This world is quite different from the one he had sought to construct for himself on earth. Here he is destitute, without money to fulfill his needs or clothes to hide his body. All his worldly earnings come to nothing. His friends desert him. He is left powerless, with nothing that he had depended on in the world to help him.

Just as life's journey is nearing completion, it is struck by disaster. What a tragic outcome to such a long, arduous journey.

21 July 1984

God loves those who avoid evil

When civil war broke out among the Muslims, Amir asked his father, Sa'ad, why he was sitting at home. "Are you suggesting that I become a champion of evil, son?" his father replied. That I can never do. Until that is, I come to possess a sword which rebounds off believers and slays disbelievers when I strike them. I heard the Prophet say that God loves the self-sufficient, God-fearing recluse."

The Test of Man

In 1945 an atom bomb destroyed the entire city of Hiroshima. The bomb that destroyed Hiroshima was equivalent to 12,500 tons of TNT. Now, nearly forty years later, the world's nuclear arsenal contains 12,000 to 15,000 megatons, each megaton being equal to a million tons of TNT. As Jonathan Schell has pointed out in his recent best-seller, 'The Fate of the Earth' man is now in a position to destroy life on earth many times over.

What, basically, are these weapons? Like any other weapon, they are just a misuse of the resources of nature. A sword is a misuse of steel, a nuclear bomb a misuse of nuclear energy.

The things from which weapons are made were in the possession of nature for millions of years, with no havoc or destruction being caused by them. When man gained control of them, however, they suddenly became destructive. Why? The reason for this is that nature has no freedom. Man, on the other hand, is free to act as he pleases. The fact is that what philosophers call a 'problem of evil' is simply a misuse; of human freedom.

Modern man takes enormous pride in the freedom he has won for himself. But it is self-discipline rather than freedom that is needed for peace to prevail on earth. The freedom of choice that man has been given in the world today is a test; it is not his right. If he uses his freedom correctly, and makes the right choice for himself, then he will be successful. But if he misuses his freedom then he is doomed to failure.

Resources that remain in the control of nature function properly. When man gains control of them, however, they cause havoc in the world. This fact shows us how order can be maintained in the world: man must learn how to utilize these resources in the way that nature utilizes them. The model of nature must be applied to human life. This is the real task facing both individuals and societies in the world today.

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Between hope and fear

Umer once said: "If a voice was to proclaim from heaven that everyone would enter paradise except for one person, I would fear that I am that one; and if a voice was to proclaim that everyone would enter hell except for one person, I would hope that I am that one."

“I Can Get a Better Price.”

During the Caliphate of Abu Bakr there was a drought and people were in great distress. The Caliph told them not to worry, for God would soon relieve them. Before long, Uthman's caravan arrived with its merchandise from Syria. There were one thousand camels in it, all of them loaded with wheat and foodstuff. When the news got around Medina, all the great traders of the city flocked to Uthman's house. They knocked on the door and he came out to meet them. He had a sheet on his shoulder, one end of which was hanging down in front of him, and the other behind him.

“Why have you come, and what do you want of me?” he said to the assembled traders.

“We have heard that a caravan of yours has arrived from Syria, in which there are one thousand camels loaded with wheat and foodstuff. We want to buy it. Sell it to us, so that we can pass it on to those who need it in Medina,” they replied.

Uthman ushered them inside. “How much profit will you give me on my merchandise?” he asked them.

“Twelve dirhams on every ten dirhams worth” they answered. “But I can get a better price,” Uthman told them. “Then we'll give you fourteen,” Uthman gave them the same answer. They put their price up to fifteen dirhams, but still Uthman said that he could get a better price.

“But who can give a better price,” they protested, “when all the merchants of Medina are gathered here?”

I can get ten dirhams for every one dirhams worth,” he told them. “Can any of you give me a better price than that?”

There was no one that could. Then Uthman recited the verse of Quran which says that those who do good will be rewarded tenfold (An 'am, 60). Then he told them that he was giving all the goods to the needy people of Medina.

If one has faith in God's promises, then one's courage is lifted to a degree where any self-sacrifice appears easy.

The Prophet once said: “Save yourselves from the fire of hell, even if it is only with a morsel of a date; and if one does not have one, then with a good word.”

Learning from Mistakes

Alan Bond is an Australian multi-millionaire. He is the owner of the yachts that have made 4 challenges for the greatest prize in sailing, America's Cup. In 1874 he made his first challenge and was wiped out 4 nil in the best of seven series. Then, in 1977, the same thing happened. In 1980 he won one race only and was beaten 4-1. These defeats deeply disappointed him. Recalling them, he says:

'Every time I'd go home depressed, and then think "next time I'll know how to do it better.'''

Sunday Times, London, September 25, 1973

Alan Bond did not waste time blaming others for his defeats. He kept on thinking what mistake it was that led to his losing time and time again. Every defeat taught him not to repeat his mistake. He did this again and again, until eventually, in 1983, he made a challenge for the coveted trophy with a new yacht, Australia II. After being 3-1 down in the series Australia II fought back to win by four races to three and take the cup from America for the first time in 120 years.

The best way of turning defeat into victory, in every walk of life, is by learning from one's mistakes.